

Lingue e Linguaggi  
Lingue Linguaggi 29 (2019), 535-556  
ISSN 2239-0367, e-ISSN 2239-0359  
DOI 10.1285/i22390359v29p535  
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it>, © 2019 Università del Salento  
This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

# APPLYING SPECIALISED LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE IN THE CLASSROOM

## ESP in social work discourse in Italy

JANE HELEN JOHNSON  
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI BOLOGNA

**Abstract** – The Social Work Corpus (SocWoC), a specially compiled repository of material of relevance to undergraduate trainee social workers consisting of almost 2 million tokens, has been presented in detail as regards compilation and description in previous work (Johnson 2016, 2017). Briefly, containing both spoken and written material in English, the corpus brings together service user interviews, case studies and other training materials, academic papers from the field of social work, newspaper articles on relevant issues, and government guidelines. Its validity is thus guaranteed since it features “actual examples of use which are drawn from the content area and which the learner is likely to have come across” (Flowerdew 1993, p. 239). Closer examination of the individual sub-corpora in SocWoC has enabled a more specifically linguistic focus on the world of social work, identifying a number of language patterns inherent to and typical of the different genres. These findings are further elaborated in this paper in order to develop classroom resources for use in an Italian undergraduate social work context in relation to the compilation of classroom material. The findings are also discussed in the light of examination of a small corpus of students’ assessed essays (SocSEC) produced both before and after using SocWoC in the classroom. The focus is thus on the transmission of specialised linguistic knowledge from the corpus findings to practical application in the classroom, with considerations which may also be extended to other ESP disciplines.

**Keywords:** English for social work; corpus methods; classroom activities.

## 1. Introduction

Undergraduates following a course in English for Specific Purposes often find themselves faced with two challenges. On the one hand, they need to become aware of and confident with the various genres typical of their discipline, while at the same time they have to achieve this in a language which is not their first. We are specifically referring here to achievement of a familiarity with frequent words and phrases from the world of social work discourse, particularly those words and phrases which occur more often than

might be expected when compared with a general text, as well as an awareness of whereabouts and how those words and phrases occur, in the sense of which words co-occur with them, what pragmatic function they might have, and in what sort of texts we might expect them to appear. Acquisition of such skills is an ongoing process and the teacher may play a major role in helping ESP students to discover the world in which they aspire to practise in another language so that they can operate successfully and achieve their goals (Dubois 2016, p. 26), enabling students to understand how and why language is used in the specific discourse community of social work and “apply their understanding proactively” (Solly 2008, p. 203).

We might say that this goal is typical of ESP in general, but it may be argued that it is particularly relevant to social services work, which depends largely on successful communication (Thompson 2010) thus requiring students to be exposed actively to such types of communication in order to acquire similar skills. Though specialised handbooks for social work are beginning to appear for students in the secondary education sector in Italy (e.g. Rudvin, Spinzi 2016), there is still little material for teaching specialised English to social work students at university level (Kornbeck 2003, 2008).

This article presents an outline of some of the salient linguistic features of a number of genres typical of social services and gives examples of how these may be exploited in the classroom. To do so, it draws on the contents of the Social Work Corpus (SocWoC) (Johnson 2016, 2017), a specially compiled repository of authentic material of relevance to undergraduate trainee social workers. Being a monitor corpus, it is constantly being amplified, with its contents at the time of writing including nearly 1.5 million words. SocWoC is made up of five sub-corpora, four of which feature mainly written material such as academic papers from the field of social work (ACAD), news reports on social work issues (NEWS), relevant newspaper opinion pieces (OPINION) and government guidelines (GOV). The fifth sub-corpus (MAT) consists of spoken material, and more specifically transcripts of service user interviews, case studies and other training materials. SocWoC thus represents examples of different genres in social work discourse (Flowerdew 1993).<sup>1</sup> Comparison between one sub-corpus and another enables a focus on both genre-specific differences as well as any differences in social work discourse at a macro level.

Containing authentic examples of different ‘social work’ genres, SocWoC may profitably be exploited in the classroom. The context here is a 30-hour English course at an Italian university for a class of about seventy second-year Social Work undergraduates, who have previously followed a

<sup>1</sup> A fuller description of an earlier version of SocWoC together with the rationale for text selection was given in Johnson (2017).

general English grammar course of 40 hours to reach an English language competence of B1+. The corpus findings may be used in such a class to raise awareness of formulaic language (e.g. Wray 2012), an important pedagogical issue since “learners tend to have a small inventory of formulaic sequences that they overuse and often have limited sensitivity to register differences” (Wray 2012, p. 235). Indeed, research (e.g. Rott 2009) has suggested that focus on formulaic sequences can improve native-likeness, while expanding students’ vocabulary and lexical richness and variety for good, effective communication. Formulaic language includes recurring collocations and phraseology (Krausse 2008) and such a focus is particularly useful where certain phrases play a pragmatically specialised role (O’Keefe *et al* 2007, p. 63), as in social work communication.

A growing body of research has revealed the utility of learner corpora in material design for ESP/EAP courses (eg. Flowerdew 2001; Gilquin *et al* 2007). A small corpus of students’ assessed essays (SocSEC)<sup>2</sup> was compiled to assess students’ current language competence prior to classroom activity focussing on SocWoC corpus features. This learner corpus may thus serve as an initial point of reference from which to gauge current language awareness and identify areas of weakness in student competence. As the activities are introduced into the course, subsequent essays collected in SocSEC will act as benchmarks for assessing the utility of such activities.

The following section will introduce the corpus linguistics techniques used to query the corpus and introduce the type of classroom activities involved. Some of the shared features of social work discourse, as exemplified in the various sub-corpora, are then described in order to establish a ‘core’ set of lexical resources with which the student needs to become familiar. Similarities and differences between social work discourse and general English will be highlighted, while comparisons will also be made between the various SocWoC sub-corpora. Existing student language awareness of such lexical resources will be compared by means of reference to SocSEC and examples of practical activities used for further awareness-raising in the classroom presented.

## 2. Methodology

This section first describes the corpus tools used to extract the linguistic features of the SocWoC and the SocSEC corpora, suggests how needs

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, the Social work Students’ Essay Collection (SocSEC) consists of approx. 100 short essays on topics such as Asylum seekers, Adopting Children, Homelessness, Parents and Marriage. Completed under examination conditions, it currently contains a total of 10,000 words.

analysis takes place on the basis of this latter corpus, and presents the type of classroom activities involved.

Corpus linguistics techniques have long been exploited in the ESP classroom (e.g. Boulton 2016, 2012; Biber *et al* 2010, p. 559). Much work has been done on how corpus linguistics allows certain features to be highlighted for subsequent close study and how this may be relevant to the language learner in general (e.g. O’Keeffe *et al* 2007; Adolphs 2006), as well as in an ESP context (e.g. Breeze 2015). Little, however, has been done as regards social work discourse. For this study, features of social work discourse were isolated using different types of corpus linguistics tools from a number of suites. Word lists, collocates, word clusters or ‘lexical bundles’ were extracted using Wordsmith Tools (Scott 2012), word profiles or ‘sketches’ using SketchEngine (Kilgarriff *et al* 2004), and lists of key semantic domains using WMatrix (Rayson 2008). Though there is little space here for giving a full description of how these tools work (see, for example, Adolphs 2006), more detail is given below as to how these queries help to exploit SocWoC.

Wordlists of the sub-corpora are examined to identify recurrent ‘topics’ in social work discourse, as well as frequently mentioned participants and this information may be used as a starting point for further investigation. Collocates of words occurring on either side of the node word can be used to investigate formulaic language. Similarly, lists of word clusters help to visualise the most common fixed patterns of a node word, enabling focus on phraseology, with the tools provided by the SketchEngine software enabling a focus on typical word usage within a phrase as well as a word’s grammatical colligations. Analysis of semantic areas allows focus on the vocabulary which accumulates in particular semantic domains. Key semantic areas in the different sub-corpora are compared with those of general English text using WMatrix. Practical constraints such as time restrictions and lack of appropriate facilities are among the reasons why students are not asked to analyse the corpus themselves, which is why this article presents the author’s analysis of some of the corpus data. However, Data-Driven Learning (Johns 1991) may profitably be implemented for future cohorts of students, indeed using corpus tools in the classroom is a tried and tested possibility in order to encourage autonomy and serendipitous learning (Bernardini 2000).

All the classroom activities for language awareness-raising involve the macro skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Beginning with the reading of selected concordances, the Tables below contain examples of possible classroom focus on language items via guided exercises such as intralingual transformation exercises using near-synonyms, and cloze exercises, as well as a focus on meaning by distinguishing differences between co-hyponyms, the matching of definitions with a word or phrase, creating taxonomies to show how topics are related, and translation, leading

to broader discussion to compare the Italian context with that of the UK/US.

The subsequent section reports just some findings resulting from the corpus analysis, with suggestions for turning such findings into relevant classroom activities. It is worth stating here that this article is not intended to provide an exhaustive analysis of all the language features in SocWoC - a more detailed corpus analysis would certainly highlight further directions for developing classroom activities than there is space to describe here. Our aim is merely to draw attention to some frequent words and phrases in social work discourse and give examples of how these may be exploited in classroom activities to stimulate learning.

### 3. Corpus findings and classroom activities

#### 3.1 Classroom focus (1): Wordlists – ‘care’

A simple wordlist enables focus on the most frequent words in a corpus. The specialisation of SocWoC is evident if the wordlist in the Annex is compared with that of the British National Corpus (henceforth BNC), with SocWoC featuring as many as twenty-six content words compared with eight in the BNC, with the content words all typical of social work discourse.

The SocWoC wordlist may be used to begin investigating certain issues in more detail. ‘care’, for example, is the 3rd most frequent content word in both SocWoC and SocSEC (the top 10 content words in SocSEC are *social, work, care, workers, people, practice, children, services, child* and *health*), but the words associated with ‘care’ in SocWoC and the learner corpus are different. For example, four out of five instances in SocSEC are preceded by TAKE, as part of the phrase *take care of*, which is overused here in relation to SocWoC (*take* is 42nd first left-hand collocate in SocWoC). This suggests that students need more exposure to uses of the word *care*.

The top first left-hand collocates of *care* in SocWoC differ according to the sub-corpus. Evaluative vocabulary such as *high-quality, safe, effective* and *inadequate* is frequently found in this position in the collection of government guidelines in GOV. In comparison, all the other sub-corpora, including the spoken MAT sub-corpus, more frequently have type rather than evaluation of care as premodifier, examples being *adult, community-based, end-of-life, foster, respite, alternative, and child*. Class discussion could first of all focus on possible reasons for this difference. Examination of expanded concordances show that it is due to the different communicative purposes of the texts involved. In class, students are then asked to focus more actively on the different collocations by reading selected extracts and sorting the collocates into type or evaluation of care, as in Table 1.

Read the extracts.<sup>3</sup>

*The complexity of managing this patient group raises concerns that clinicians are struggling to provide appropriate care under the confines of a standard 10-minute consultation.*

*The Triangle of Care for Dementia describes how meaningful involvement and inclusion of carers can lead to better care for people with dementia.*

*The project aimed to provide a dedicated, sustainable, equitable Palliative Care Social Work model to adults and their carer(s)....*

*We have seen some examples of outstanding care despite increased demand for services and challenging efficiency savings.*

Sort the collocations of 'care' into:

a) evaluation of care b) type of care

Table 1  
Exercises with concordances of 'care'.

This exercise may be extended by getting students to match the definitions of the various types of care, suggesting possible equivalents in an Italian context, and focussing on the parameters used to describe the quality of care in different contexts, as in Table 2.

1) Match the definitions with these different types of care.

e.g. palliative care, respite care, kinship care

2) Complete the gaps with a word or phrase describing the type of care

3) Read the descriptions below. How would you evaluate the care described? *effective, inadequate, high-quality*

a) For example, following an inspection in June 2015 we cancelled the registration of a GP practice because inspectors had serious concerns about the service and the risks to people using it. During the inspection we identified one locum staff member who had treated patients but could not provide evidence that they were medically qualified to do so. The management of medicines was found to be unsafe and placed patients at serious risk of harm. [CQC\_rep\_001] [*inadequate*]

b) Strong leadership with a culture of transparency where staff are valued for openly sharing concerns and reporting incidents or near misses. Clear lines of accountability and responsibility in all roles. Always putting patients first and working with other departments to maximise patient outcomes and experiences. [CQC\_rep\_001] [*high-quality*]

In groups, discuss and find Italian equivalents for these types of care: *respite care, kinship care, end-of-life care*

Table 2  
Extension of exercises with concordances of 'care'.

<sup>3</sup> For reasons of space, only a small selection of concordances will be shown in the Tables to illustrate the type of activity. In the classroom, the students will have access to a number of carefully selected concordances. Possible answers and keys are shown within square brackets.

All these classroom activities are useful for raising awareness not only about vocabulary but also providing information and stimulating discussion about the differences between Italy and the UK as regards the provision of care.

### 3.2 Classroom focus (2): Wordlists – ‘children’

Many of the content words in both SocSEC and SocWoC are social actors and grammatical participants, e.g. CHILD/CHILDREN, FAMILY/FAMILIES, PERSON/PEOPLE, WORKER/S, STAFF, STUDENTS. While we might expect to find these in social work discourse in general, students need to be aware that these words might tend to associate with different words depending on the text type. By way of example, let us take the collocates of one of these participants – *children* – across the sub-corpora. This allows us to focus on formulaic chunks of language by investigating close collocates, such as the word/s immediately preceding our node word. In social work discourse, for example, is the word *children* closely associated with the same words as in everyday English? The top ten first left-hand content collocates of *children* in the British National Corpus and the written sub-corpora of SocWoC are shown in Table 3. The BNC’s frequent mention of handicapped and deaf children is possibly a sign of the age of the corpus itself, dating as it does from the beginning of the 1990s. Accepted terms have changed since then, and *handicapped* and *deaf* are very infrequent terms indeed in the SocWoC corpus, and never used in conjunction with children. This fact is itself worthy of further discussion in the classroom, leading to a discussion of sensitive terminology which may be picked up in later activities (such as in Classroom focus no. 3).

BNC	ACAD	GOV	NEWS	OPINION
young	safeguarding	safeguarding	protect	unaccompanied
their	(looked) after	authority	vulnerable	vulnerable
older	vulnerable	disabled	looked-after	looked-after
three	other	safeguard	poor	young
two	secure	individual	six	asylum-seeking
younger	young	(looked) after	Zealand	related
four	foster	older	abused	(looked) after
handicapped	abused	protect	five	help
small	adopted	protecting	young	refugee
deaf	protect	young	(looked) after	new

Table 3  
Top ten first left-hand content collocates of *children*:  
written SocWOC subcorpora and the BNC.

Throughout the written sub-corpora, one collocate is particularly frequent. This is *looked after*, also appearing in abbreviated form as *LAC* (looked-after children), or *CLA* (children looked after) (mainly in the ACAD subcorpus). The term itself never co-occurs with *children* in the BNC and thus we may

presume that its acquired meaning of ‘in care’ is specific to social work. The meaning is not particularly transparent for the Italian social work student, unlike its near-synonym *children in care*, and thus needs particular practice in use.

Classroom work may focus on concordances to identify the meaning and typical phraseology of *looked-after*, contrasting it with the phrase *in care* and other related words such as *foster* and *adopt*. Some examples are:

- (1) First, children who become looked after ‘originate from the most disadvantaged social groups’ BJSW 2015\_1\_3
- (2) Since 2010, the government’s annual SSDA903 data collection has included information about children who are looked after by local authorities, including the number of care orders made. BJSW 2016\_4\_8
- (3) The campaign aims to tackle stigma around children and young people in care by interviewing inspiring care leavers who have gone on to have successful careers. OPI\_GUA\_3/10/16
- (4) As there may be greater risks for looked after children and care leavers online, there may also be greater opportunities. BJSW 2016\_4\_13
- (5) Emma stated that she does not want Chloe to go into foster-care at this time BJSW 2016\_7\_17
- (6) only two out of the sixty children studied entered foster-care during the research
- (7) The children placed with foster-carers ranged from birth to eighteen years, and were diverse in their nationalities and racial or ethnic heritage. BJSW 2016\_6\_19
- (8) This is an order that gives the local authority permission to place the child for adoption. BJSW 2016\_2\_2

Word forms of *adopt* also collocate with *children* and belong to the same semantic field as *in care*, *looked after* and *foster*. Students may discuss the differences in meaning after reading the concordances: once a child is adopted s/he is no longer considered to be ‘looked after’ in the social work sense. As regards phraseology, reading the concordances enables colligating prepositions to be brought to the students’ attention. For example, children are placed *in* [foster] care but *for* adoption. The different usage of prepositions may be highlighted by contrasting with the Italian equivalent *dare in adozione* (literally ‘give in adoption’).

Classroom activities could include compilation of a ‘phraseology’ table as shown in Table 4.



English language focus	<i>looked after</i>	<i>in care</i>	<i>foster</i>	<i>adopt</i>
Phraseology	<i>children + <u>BE/BECOME</u> + looked after</i>	<i>children + BE + in care</i>  <i>PLACE + children + in care</i>	GO INTO/ENTER foster care  <u>PLACE in</u> foster care <u>PLACE with</u> foster carers fostered children foster children	<u>place child for</u> adoption adopt a child
word order with <i>children</i>	pre-modified <i>looked-after children</i>	post modification only <i>children in care</i>	pre-modified: <i>foster/ed children</i>	adopted children
language variety?	UK English			
Italian equivalent?				

Table 4  
Phraseology table for foster/ adopt/looked after + children.

As a follow-up activity students are asked to read the concordances and complete the exercises in Table 5 in class.

Read the concordances of <i>looked after</i> , <i>adopt</i> , <i>in care</i> , <i>foster</i>
1) Fill the gaps with the correct preposition ( <i>in</i> , <i>for</i> , <i>into</i> , <i>with</i> , <i>to</i> ).
2) Complete the taxonomy: [ <i>looked after</i> includes <i>foster/in care</i> but not <i>adopt</i> ]
3) Rewrite the concordances of <i>looked after</i> replacing the phrase with <i>in care</i> .
4) Match the definitions below with the terms: ADOPT - FOSTER - LOOKED AFTER a) temporary custody or guardianship for children whose parents are dead or unable to look after them. [foster] b) the act of legally taking a child to be taken care of as your own [adopt] c) children living with relatives who aren't parents, e.g. children living with a grandparent/ older sibling [looked after]

Table 5  
Follow-up activities for foster/ adopt/looked after + children.

Possible extension involves discussion of what is covered by the terms used for the Italian context, proposing a satisfactory equivalent in Italian for the phrases *foster*, *adopt*, *looked after*, and *in care*.

### 3.3 Classroom focus (3): Wordlists – ‘people’

This sub-section will give examples of how another frequent participant in SocWoC provides scope for further classroom work. The most frequent first left-hand collocates show that people are often described in social work

discourse as *young; older; disabled; LGBT; LGBTQI; vulnerable; and poor*. Of course, the head noun may also be post-modified and students can focus on the flexibility of post-modification – often by means of a prepositional phrase – beginning with a comparison of frequency in one sub-corpus. In the subcorpus of academic texts, for example, there are 68 occurrences of *disabled people* and 84 occurrences of *people with disabilities*. Students’ attention can be brought to the fact that post-modification is more common than premodification in academic texts and they may be encouraged to compare this figure with the other sub-corpora. Variations in prepositional phrases may be identified in the classroom with reference to a list of selected concordances of the phrase *people with*, including a focus on co-hyponyms and their collocations, unpacking of acronyms specific to social work, and the grouping of adjectives according to meaning, as shown in Table 6.

Read the sentences containing the prepositional phrase <i>people with</i> .	Which phrases in column 3 do <u>not</u> refer to a medical condition?  What do these acronyms stand for? ABI, TEC, LD, HIV, HCV.  Which acronyms refer to medical conditions?
<i>impairment/ disability/ illness/ condition/ disorders/ needs</i> are all general terms. They can be modified by type (e.g. <i>learning disability</i> ) and/or by degree (e.g. <i>severe illness</i> ). Find these general terms in the concordance examples and tick the box to indicate which adjectives of degree or type are associated.	
Complete the sentences with one of the following type modifiers: <i>dementia, eating, learning, mobility, ABI</i>	a. People with .....impairments find it difficult to move about. [mobility] b. Aspergers’ syndrome is an example of a/n ..... disability [learning] c. People with .....are included under the broad umbrella of ‘adults with cognitive impairments’ [ABI] d. people with .....may easily forget things [dementia] e. bingeing and vomiting are typical symptoms of a/n .....disorder [eating]
Group the adjectives of degree according to their meaning in the context of the phrase <i>people with x conditions</i> : ( <i>severe, serious, acute, major, chronic, long term, long-standing, enduring, complex, multiple</i> )	very bad [ <i>severe, serious acute,major</i> ]  something that doesn’t go away [ <i>chronic, long term, long standing, enduring</i> ]  complicated or involving more than one [ <i>complex, multiple</i> ]

Table 6  
Classroom activities for *people with*.

Discussion in class could then focus on the topic of sensitive terminology (e.g. *disabled people* is a phrase less acceptable to the community nowadays than *people with disabilities*).

Students can also be made aware of the flexibility of post-modification

which allows for further internal specification, such as “people with complex or severe disabilities including autism”. The topic could be further extended by investigating the collocates of *disabilities*, *illness*, *conditions* and *health issues*.

### 3.4 Classroom focus (4): Clusters in social work discourse

While the separate words making up the clusters of all sub-corpora obviously feature in the single wordlist itself, viewed individually it is difficult to identify their function. A cluster wordlist makes this easier. The most frequent 3-word clusters in SocSEC are *a lot of*, *in order to*, *is very important*, *on account of*, *one of the*, *the most important*, and *the number of*. A comparison of the SocSEC list with the SocWoC list suggests overuse of simple quantity phrases in SocSEC (*a lot of*, *the number of*), while simple phrases such as *is very important*, and *the most important*, frequent in SocSEC, do not appear in SocWoC, which instead features more complex structural elements, such as *the importance of*. This would suggest more focus on these is required in the classroom. An examination of individual word cluster lists for each sub-corpus enables identification of similarities and differences. For example, some of the most frequent 3-5 word clusters in the sub-corpus ACAD are:

<i>social work practice</i>	<i>social workers and</i>	<i>one of the</i>	<i>in the context</i>
<i>as well as</i>	<i>social workers in</i>	<i>social work students</i>	<i>such as the</i>
<i>the social work</i>	<i>a number of</i>	<i>some of the</i>	<i>in the context of</i>
<i>in order to</i>	<i>the role of</i>	<i>there is a</i>	<i>social work in</i>
<i>social work education</i>	<i>in the UK</i>	<i>the impact of</i>	<i>the quality of</i>
<i>in relation to</i>	<i>the context of</i>	<i>that social workers</i>	<i>ways in which</i>
<i>per cent of</i>	<i>a range of</i>	<i>social workers to</i>	<i>social workers are</i>
<i>the importance of</i>	<i>part of the</i>	<i>the process of</i>	<i>for social workers</i>
<i>in terms of</i>	<i>of the social</i>	<i>a social worker</i>	<i>of the child</i>
<i>social work and</i>	<i>to social work</i>	<i>the need for</i>	<i>as part of</i>
<i>for social work</i>	<i>and social work</i>	<i>understanding of the</i>	<i>social works</i>
<i>the development of</i>	<i>the social worker</i>	<i>in the USA</i>	<i>the concept of</i>
<i>the use of</i>	<i>in this study</i>	<i>social work research</i>	<i>the fact that</i>

Table 7  
Frequent 3-5 word clusters in the ACAD subcorpus.

With this list to hand, students can be asked to group phrases into quantity (*a number of*, *a range of*, *part of the*, *per cent of*, *some of the*, *one of the*), prepositional phrases marking relation (*as well as*, *in order to*, *in relation to*, *in terms of*), and abstract logical connectors (*the importance of*, *the fact that*, *the concept of*, *the context of*, *the role of*, *the impact of*, *the process of*, *the quality of*, *the use of*, *the development of*). A focus on structure highlights that these latter are often prepositional constructions. Prepositional phrases are examples of formulaic language that students need to memorize as chunks. The most frequent three-five word prepositional phrases in the academic papers sub-corpus ACAD are as follows:

<i>the importance of</i>	<i>the context of</i>	<i>the process of</i>	<i>a lack of</i>
<i>the development of</i>	<i>a range of</i>	<i>the need for</i>	<i>a sense of</i>
<i>the relationship between</i>	<i>the impact of</i>	<i>the quality of</i>	<i>the majority of</i>
<i>the use of</i>	<i>in order to</i>	<i>the concept of</i>	<i>as well as</i>
<i>a number of</i>	<i>in terms of</i>	<i>in relation to</i>	
<i>the role of</i>	<i>in this study</i>	<i>the nature of</i>	

Table 8  
Frequent 3-5 word prepositional phrases in the ACAD subcorpus.

An example of classroom work focussing on such clusters in ACAD is shown in Table 9.

1) Read the list of word clusters. 2) Read the extended examples. Fill the spaces with the correct choice of Noun.	<p>a) Social service and social workers, in particular, spoke about the..... of resisting government agendas. One senior social service worker reflected the sentiments of many when she noted: "...we don't count our hours closely here. If we did, we'd probably all cry." [<i>importance</i>]</p> <p>b) Social workers in the research talked at length about the .....of their role and of the multifaceted issues that informed their work with sexually abused children. [<i>complexity</i>]</p> <p>c) Mother–infant foster placements are used where appropriate. A final decision about the .....for permanent removal is made in conjunction with the courts by the time the infant is six. [<i>need</i>]</p>
The phrase <i>the process of</i> can be followed by what parts of speech?	<p>a) We developed this case study by interviewing the group members about <i>the process of</i> working through their experiences of private pain and loss to addressing this in increasingly public ways. [<i>gerund</i>]</p> <p>b) In contrast, the existence of generations and the process of generational change can be conceived as <i>a continuous process of</i> renewal of participants in society. [<i>nominal group</i>]</p>
Read the concordances. <sup>4</sup> Which other phrases follow the same pattern of phrase + Noun OR gerund? [e.g. <i>the importance of</i> , <i>a sense of</i> ]	
Look at examples of the phrase <i>the development of</i> . Does it follow the same pattern? Focus on example (b) and explain the use of the –ing form here.	<p>a) Training includes topics such as, for example, attachment theory, brain development research and the negative effects of cortisol on <i>the development of</i> behaviour and relationships.</p> <p>b) Notably, the social constructivist paradigm has a potential to confront the stigma attached to depressive experiences and can facilitate <i>the development of</i> helping relationships.</p> <p>c) The acquisition of a relevant and theoretically appropriate knowledge base thus constitutes a fundamental requirement for <i>the development of</i> competent social work practice with LGBT people.</p>

Table 9  
Examples of classroom activities for word clusters in academic texts.

<sup>4</sup> A list of concordances is given to students on a separate sheet.

### 3.5 Classroom focus (5): Frequent clusters: ‘the fact that’

As an example of how such a list may be further exploited in the classroom, let us look at the cluster *the fact that*, a cluster which occurs only once in SocSEC. Why should this cluster be important for non-native social work students? The utility of the ‘factive nominal’ (Lees 1960) for social workers is evident from Thompson’s (1996) description: “expressing a proposition as a fact allows me to stand back from it and to comment on it as I bring it into my text, which means that if I want to comment on a proposition as I bring it in, I am more likely to express it as a fact” (1996, p. 210). We may see how useful it is in example 9 from the spoken MAT corpus:

- (9) The fact that Ara's sexual abuse by her siblings as well as other family members occurred with the acknowledgment of her parents often kept me awake at night.  
MAT\_CN\_ISO\_05

Labelling something as a fact, like packaging an issue by using nominalisation, makes it difficult to disagree with. Especially where the fact might be controversial, as in the above example, the utility of this frame becomes clear in social work communication. It also appears in other sub-corpora, clearly signalling writer/speaker evaluation, as in example 10:

- (10) With the obvious impact of social care cuts on the NHS he is right to argue for increased resourcing of care - but isn't the real issue the fact that we have abandoned what was once a key element of our welfare state to what Behan terms "the market"? NEWS\_GUA\_17/10/16

A classroom task could be to define or paraphrase the ‘fact’ (the proposition) implied in the examples.

### 3.6 Classroom focus (6): Frequent clusters: ‘as well as’

Another frequent cluster in SocWoC is the linker *as well as*. This phrase would merit further attention in the classroom. It is underused as a coordinating item by Italian students who tend to stick to ‘and’ and is often used incorrectly, as shown in the single example in the learner corpus SocSEC.<sup>5</sup>

The different usage may be highlighted by giving students examples from the spoken MAT corpus, where the relative frequency of *as well as* is higher than in the other sub-corpora, as in examples 11-13.

<sup>5</sup> \*“parents that fight and argue everyday can make children confused as well as a divorce”.\* [0075]. A possible correct version might be; “parents that fight and argue everyday can make children confused just as much a divorce can”.

- (11) We spend a lot of time in staff meetings talking about the impact of culture on health care delivery. I sit on the hospital's diversity committee where we consider ways to serve the many cultural groups who populate this city as well as those newly arriving. bisman\_cn\_suz\_01
- (12) She conveys caring and compassion as well as respect for the service users and respect for the profession and role she performs. bisman\_co5\_cn\_ter\_01
- (13) Well, she gets tired more easily so she's, uh, you know, she used to be really extrovert, but now she's just kind of really going back into herself. You know, not being able to go out much. It's really difficult for her to communicate as well as it's really affected her speech. woodcock\_D\_sue\_01

Students could be asked to decide which of the examples of ‘as well as’ correspond to the meaning of ‘not only’ (examples 11 and 12), and which corresponds to the meaning ‘too’ (example 13). Follow-up may also include speaking and listening practice to focus on pronunciation of ‘as well as’ in a single chunk where relevant (as in examples 11 and 12). Students are then asked to paraphrase the excerpts to focus on the different usage, as in Table 10.

<p>Read the sentences. Using a single clause, replace <i>not only/but also</i> with <i>as well as</i></p>	<p>1. <u>Not only</u> does she convey caring and compassion <u>but also</u> respect for the service users and respect for the profession and role she performs.</p> <p>[=She conveys caring and compassion as well as respect for the service users and respect for the profession and role she performs.]</p> <p>2. We consider ways to serve <u>not only</u> the many cultural groups who populate this city <u>but also</u> those newly arriving.</p> <p>[=we consider ways to serve the many cultural groups who populate this city <u>as well as</u> those newly arriving.]</p>
---	--

Table 10  
Classroom activities for *as well as*.

### **3.7 Classroom focus (7): Clusters in spoken social work discourse**

Students need to be aware of clusters more frequent in one sub-genre rather than another, and this could be an opportunity for contrasting formal with more informal, or written versus spoken genres. The top fifty 3-5 word clusters in the spoken sub-corpus MAT are as follows:

<i>what do you</i>	<i>at the end</i>	<i>it sounds like</i>	<i>you like to</i>
<i>I want to</i>	<i>at the end of</i>	<i>like to do</i>	<i>you need to</i>
<i>at the moment</i>	<i>for you to</i>	<i>to do is</i>	<i>about how you</i>
<i>I need to</i>	<i>is that ok</i>	<i>to do that</i>	<i>be able to</i>
<i>you want to</i>	<i>the end of</i>	<i>to find out</i>	<i>have you got</i>
<i>do you think</i>	<i>to see you</i>	<i>to go back</i>	<i>I want to do</i>
<i>I'd like to</i>	<i>what do you think</i>	<i>to help you</i>	<i>if you are</i>
<i>a lot of</i>	<i>would you like</i>	<i>to talk to</i>	<i>need to do</i>
<i>for you and</i>	<i>do you know</i>	<i>want to do</i>	<i>need to find</i>
<i>to talk about</i>	<i>do you mean</i>	<i>we can do</i>	<i>need to talk</i>
<i>we need to</i>	<i>do you want</i>	<i>what do you mean</i>	<i>sounds like you</i>
<i>you and your</i>	<i>I come in</i>	<i>what I want</i>	
<i>a social worker</i>	<i>if you don't</i>	<i>what I want to</i>	

Table 11  
The most frequent 3-5 word clusters in the MAT sub-corpus.

Hardly any of these appear in the top hundred SocWoC clusters as a whole so we may conclude they are typical of spoken and informal language. With the help of concordances showing the clusters in context, students can be asked to classify them according to their linguistic function, e.g. verbal groups (mental processes: *need, think, want, mean, find out, see, would like to*; verbal processes: *talk*; material processes: *do, go back, help, come*), interrogative forms, infinitives, time phrases (*at the moment, at the end of*), and generic quantification (*a lot of*).

Though some of these clusters are frequent in spoken language in general, a particular emphasis on mental processes and interrogative forms is even more typical of social work discourse. It is also important to look at the pragmatically specialised functions of phrases in social work discourse such as *sounds like you, is that ok, what do you mean*, which in context not only fulfill the function of politeness and face work (Brown, Levinson 1987) but also have the function specific to social work of 'reaching for feelings' (Shulman 2009), as in example 14.

- (14) So, Karen, it sounds like you feel that you're left with the care of the children and you find it hard to get everyone up in the morning to get them to school.

In the classroom this could be approached by having students distinguish social worker turns from service user speaker turns in two stages: 1) prediction via discussion 2) verification by reading concordances, as in Table 12.

Who do you think says this phrase: the social worker or service user?	<i>or sounds like you don't think that anybody cares about how you are feeling</i> [social worker] <i>I feel like I've messed everything up.</i> [service user] <i>whether you are really feeling OK or whether you will feel like running away again</i> [social worker]
Listen to the dialogue and check whether you were right.	

Table 12  
Classroom activities for speaker turns.

### 3.8 Classroom focus (8): Semantic fields

#### 3.8.1 General discourse items

A comparison of the written sub-corpora with the MAT sub-corpus of mainly spoken text highlights a number of 'key' discourse segments:

<i>yeah</i>	<i>hello</i>	<i>um</i>	<i>thank_you</i>
<i>you_know</i>	<i>oh</i>	<i>I_mean</i>	<i>sorry</i>
<i>yes</i>	<i>do_you_think</i>	<i>right</i>	<i>they_say</i>
<i>no</i>	<i>obviously</i>	<i>I_see</i>	
<i>all_right</i>	<i>kind_of</i>	<i>uh</i>	

Table 13  
Key discourse segments in the MAT sub-corpus.

Classroom work could focus on pragmatic meaning, position in the spoken turn, and language variety; for example, *kind of* is more frequent in spoken US material than in the UK texts. Another classroom activity would be to delete such phrases from the transcript and have students replace them appropriately.

#### 3.8.2 The semantic field of 'worry'

Analysing semantic fields with the help of WMatrix (Rayson 2008) shows the semantic field of WORRY to be prominent in four out of the five sub-corpora (not present in ACAD). It is particularly prominent in the spoken sub-corpus MAT. For MAT for example, the components of the semantic field of 'WORRY' include the following lexical items:

*worried, care, concerned, concerns, trouble, stress, worry, worrying, troubled, concern, nervous, bother, bothering, worries, troubles, stressful, anxiously, anxious, cares, distress*

Students can focus on the components and concordances of this semantic group in the different sub-corpora in order to highlight differences in



phraseology, as in Table 14.

Read the concordances of WORRY /ANXIETY / CONCERN/ BOTHER/ CARE/ DISTRESS/ TROUBLE	which can be used as a verb? which is used as an adjective before the noun? which is used as an adjective after the noun? which is used as both? which describes a state? which describes a person? what does the adverb modify?
Now complete the sentences with the correct word form of the lemma in brackets	

Table 14  
Classroom activities for items from the semantic field of WORRY.

Students may then be asked to focus on how usages vary according to genre. For example, here are some concordances of *concerned* in the spoken MAT sub-corpus:

to let you know that I am very **concerned** about what you said about hurting Mrs. H, I 'm very **concerned** about your daughter. She is talking Well , you know, I 'm **concerned** about making sure Ben's , you know It's natural to be really **concerned** about your child's development saving time because you're obviously **concerned** I don't really You say you are **concerned** about Ben and different kinds of

Instead, concordances of *concerned* in GOV include the following:

we believe that the providers **concerned** have the ability and the capacity to long-term improvement, we are **concerned** by the wide variation in the these practitioners to be **concerned** about children's safety and wellbeing carer, professionals were most **concerned** by the child's father who had a For young children this often **concerned** emotional development linked to of the young carer and adults **concerned**. If a local authority considers records relating to the child **concerned** and any application under the permission from the copyright holders **concerned**. To view this licence : visit organisation , we are increasingly **concerned** about the crisis in social care as coordinator by someone who was **concerned** about him. Jim had spent seven

A comparison would be necessary between the different uses of 'concerned' in GOV and MAT, which could present problems in understanding and reproduction for Italian native speakers. Classroom activities could thus involve students comparing meaning, usage, and possible translation, focusing on the different equivalents in Italian, such as *riguardare*, *coinvolgere*, and *preoccuparsi*.

## 4. Conclusion

This article sets out to show how a purpose-built corpus of social work discourse can provide material for awareness-raising as regards appropriate English language, through transformation of corpus evidence into classroom activities. Some examples of the language features of social work discourse extracted from SocWoC and its sub-corpora have been given, and suggestions provided for classroom exploitation.

Wordlists highlighted frequent words such as *care*, words which were then examined in greater detail to focus on collocates and usage/phraseology. The focus here has been on formulaic language, i.e. how words are combined in phrases, giving examples from authentic texts in the SocWoC corpus to stimulate students to form their own phrases. Wordlists have also enabled us to focus on the main participants in social work discourse such as children and people. Closer examination showed how longer phrases could become the subject of useful teaching in the ESP for social work classroom, particularly where comparison with their native Italian is not so helpful, as in the case of 'looked after children'. Other examples included word clusters which were frequent in certain sub-corpora, including discourse markers having a certain structural form such as *as well as* and *the fact that*. Though these clusters are certainly not unique to social work discourse, they fulfill a specific pragmatic function here. Semantic vocabulary fields were also touched upon, including that of WORRY and related vocabulary such as *concern*. Differences between usage of *concern* in one sub-corpus and another were highlighted.

Exposure to authentic examples in context, particularly in the form of expanded concordances, provides starting points which can be exploited in the ESP language classroom in which students can become familiar with a range of social work language items. The macro skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are brought into play through a variety of activities including cloze and transformation exercises, matching definitions and the creation of taxonomies. A focus on both meaning and form is given. Extension, where students apply their new language knowledge in discussion, takes place also by means of comparison with the local context.

The work-in-progress written learner corpus SocSEC has been referred to here in the first of its two roles: as an initial benchmark to see whether and to what extent students currently employ language typical of social work. Subsequently, evidence of successful language acquisition will be measured through adding further examples of students' written work post-course to SocSEC. Consolidation of work on SocSEC will provide further needs analysis as well as post-course evaluation and this will be the focus of future study.

The SocWoC corpus itself is constantly being amplified in order to increase the wealth of language information available, particularly as regards examples of discourse from an English as a Lingua Franca environment, which is highly relevant to the social work context in Italy. Future research will need to focus on ways to exploit such new data, while at the same time, a greater variety of classroom activities will be developed in order to exploit the linguistic data already available.

With the increasing need to incorporate specialised discourse into English courses at university level (e.g. Breeze 2015), it is imperative for lecturers teaching English to become familiar themselves with the discourse world of their students and combine ‘traditional’ English language learning practices with elements from language for specific purposes. As illustrated in detail in this paper, one way to do this is to assemble an appropriate corpus of material, use corpus tools to extract language features, and apply language teaching practices to combine them with suitable classroom activities.

**Bionote:** Jane Helen Johnson is Research Assistant at the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the University of Bologna. A qualified teacher of English as a Foreign Language, she currently teaches English for Social Workers on the Social Services degree course at the School of Political Sciences as well as English for Specific Purposes on the Masters degree course in Language, Society and Communication. Her research interests include English as a Medium of Instruction, Translation, Corpus Linguistics and Corpus Stylistics, and particularly Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), while her current research projects combine CADS and English for Specific Purposes.

**Author’s address:** [janehelen.johnson@unibo.it](mailto:janehelen.johnson@unibo.it)

**Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank the European Union for their precious financial support to the current research.

## References

- Adolphs S. 2006, *Introducing electronic text analysis. A practical guide for language and literary students*, Routledge, London/New York.
- Bernardini S. 2000, *Systematising serendipity. Proposals for concordancing large corpora with language learners*, in Burnard L. and McEnery T. (eds.), *Rethinking Language pedagogy from a corpus perspective*, Peter Lang, Hamburg, pp. 225-234.
- Biber D., Reppen R. and Friginal E. 2010, *Research in corpus linguistics*, in Kaplan R.R. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 548-570.
- Boulton A. 2012, *Corpus consultation for ESP: A review of empirical research*, in Boulton A., Carter-Thomas S. and Rowley-Jolivet E. (eds.), *Corpus-informed research and learning in ESP: Issues and applications*, Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 263-293.
- Boulton A. 2016, *Integrating corpus tools and techniques in ESP courses*, in "ASp" 69, pp. 113-137.
- Breeze R. 2015, *Teaching the Vocabulary of Legal Documents: A Corpus-Driven Approach*, in "ESP Today" 3 [1], pp. 44-63.
- Brown P. and Levinson S.C. 1987, *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Dubois M. 2016, *Science as vocation? Discipline, profession and impressionistic sociology*, in "Asp" 69, pp. 21-39.
- Flowerdew J. 1993, *Concordancing as a tool in course design*, in "System" 21, pp. 231-244.
- Flowerdew L. 2001, *Exploitation of small learner corpora in EAP materials design*, in Ghadessy M., Henry A. and Roseberry R.L. (eds.), *Small Corpus Studies and ELT*, Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 363-379.
- Gilquin G., Granger S. and Paquot M. 2007, *Learner corpora: the missing link in EAP pedagogy*, in "Journal of English for Academic Purposes" 6, pp. 319-335.
- Johns T. 1991, *Should you be persuaded: two samples of data-driven learning materials*, in Johns T. and King P. (eds.), *Classroom concordancing*, "English Language Research Journal" 4, pp. 1-16.
- Johnson J.H. 2016, *Constructing an ESP course for Social Services undergraduates: corpus tools to the rescue*, paper presented within Teaching Practises in "ESP today", Seminar 14, ESSE conference (English Society for the Study of English), Galway, Ireland.
- Johnson J.H. 2017, *The SocWoC corpus: compiling and exploiting ESP material for undergraduate social workers*, in Sarré C. and Whyte S. (eds.), *New developments in ESP teaching and learning research*, Research-publishing.net, pp. 133-151. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.cssw2017.749> (05.05.19).
- Kilgariff A., Rychly P., Smrz P. and Tugwell D. 2004, *The Sketch Engine*, in Proc. EURALEX 2004, Université de Bretagne Sud, Lorient, pp. 105-116.
- Kornbeck J. (ed.) 2003, *Language Teaching in the Social Work Curriculum*, Logophon Verlag, Mainz.
- Kornbeck J. 2008, *A "Reverse Mission" Perspective on Second-Language Classes as part of Social Work Education Programmes*, in "Portularia: Revista de Trabajo Social" 8 [2], pp. 247-264.
- Krausse S. 2008, *On the role of student research in the ESP classroom: A call for sustainable language skills*, in Fortanet-Gómez I. and Raisanen C.A. (eds.), *ESP in*

- European Higher Education. Integrating language and content*, Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, pp. 233-243.
- Lees R.B. 1960, *The grammar of English nominalisations*, Mouton, The Hague.
- O’Keeffe A., McCarthy M. and Carter R. 2007, *From corpus to classroom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Rayson P. 2008, *From key words to key semantic domains*, in “International Journal of Corpus Linguistics” 13 [4], pp. 519-549.
- Rott S. 2009, *The effect of awareness-raising on the use of formulaic constructions*, in Corrigan R., Moravcsik E.A. and Ouali H.(eds.), *Formulaic Language Vol. 2: Acquisition, Loss, Psychological Reality and Functional Explanations*, Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 387-404.
- Rudvin M. and Spinzi C.G. 2016, *Exploring Identities. Fundamentals in Human Sciences*, Trinity, Whitebridge.
- Scott M. 2012, *WordSmith Tools version 6*, Stroud, Lexical Analysis Software.
- Shulman L. 2009, *The skills of helping individuals, families, groups and communities*, 6th ed., Brooks/Cole Cengage Publishers, Belmont.
- Solly M. 2008, *Implementing the Bologna process in Italy. A distinctive approach to language learning in domain-specific contexts*, in Fortanet-Gómez I. and Rasanen C.A. (eds.), *ESP in European Higher Education. Integrating language and content*, Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, pp. 199-212.
- Thompson G. 1996, *Introducing functional grammar*, Arnold, London.
- Thompson N. 2010, *Theorizing Social Work Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Wray A. 2012, *What do we (think we) know about formulaic language? An evaluation of the current state of play*, in “Annual Review of Applied Linguistics” 32, pp. 231-254.

## Annex

### *The top 100 words in SocWoC*

1 the	35 about	69 some
2 and	36 which	70 family
3 #	37 people	71 will
4 of	38 practice	72 between
5 to	39 children	73 do
6 in	40 more	74 she
7 a	41 can	75 need
8 social	42 has	76 within
9 that	43 services	77 so
10 for	44 but	78 p
11 is	45 child	79 should
12 with	46 who	80 our
13 as	47 al	81 than
14 on	48 et	82 time
15 work	49 these	83 s
16 this	50 there	84 professional
17 be	51 all	85 being
18 their	52 you	86 study
19 are	53 also	87 would
20 it	54 health	88 if
21 was	55 what	89 where
22 care	56 been	90 into
23 by	57 research	91 local
24 or	58 may	92 my
25 from	59 had	93 those
26 not	60 how	94 role
27 they	61 other	95 students
28 have	62 support	96 he
29 at	63 such	97 worker
30 i	64 her	98 mental
31 were	65 one	99 through
32 an	66 service	100 staff
33 workers	67 them	
34 we	68 when	